OPINION

September 1967

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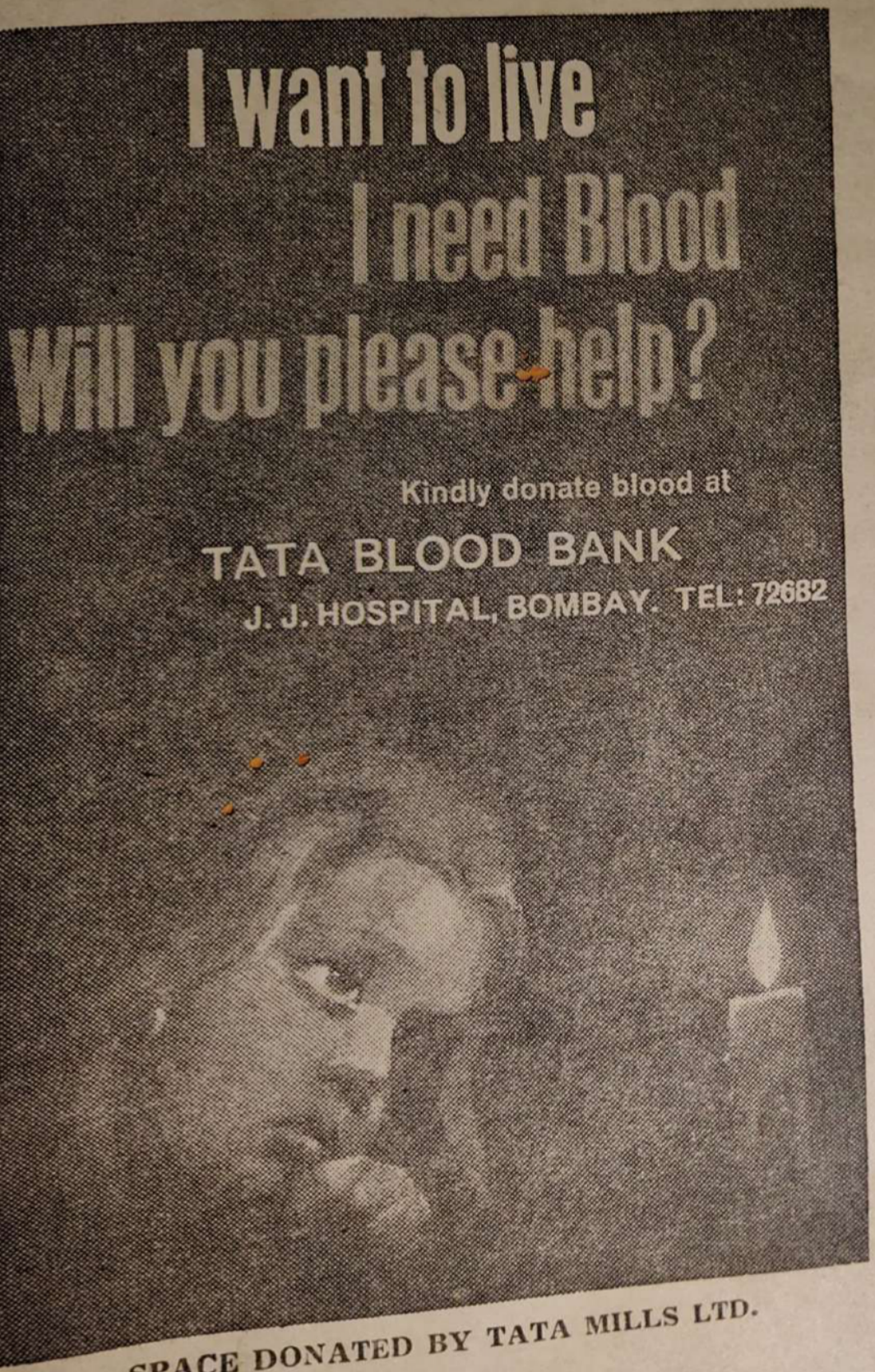

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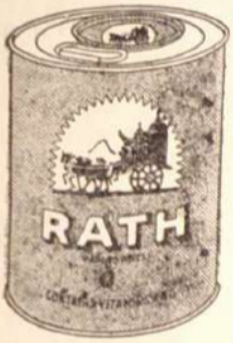

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THE PUBLIC VOICE

"IS IT TRUE, this story I heard yesterday about the man chosen for the new Foreign Minister being a well-known Communist?" a lecturer in Politics asked his journalist friend as they met at the 106 bus terminus. "I don't know that any appointment has been made", said the latter. "But I did hear of a report from Delhi about the Prime Minister's mind working in that direction. If you mean the same person as I do, yes, that's right, then there's little doubt that he is a Communist." "But will the Congress Party stand for it? I wouldn't think so," said the lecturer. "The Congress Party stood for Krishna Menon, didn't it, until he got us badly beaten by his Communist Chinese friends, so why not for this flamboyand cheerful type, who outwardly at least is a great improvement on that sour puss," said the journalist. "You don't mean to say you think it's all right" indignantly cried the lecturer. "Why—" "Yes, yes, I agree with you whole-heartedly," interrupted the journalist, "it is most dangerous to have a Communist in the Cabinet at all, let alone as Foreign Minister. But who cares about the nation nowadays? You and perhaps I, and what do we count for? Just a couple of wage-slaves." "No, I tell you it won't do. If Mrs. Gandhi is foolish enough to do this, I am sure it will bring her down. There's no excuse for such crassness," said the lecturer. "Well, I hope you're right," replied the journalist. "But you know nowadays *sub chalta hai*. This West Asian affair, didn't we, with Chagla there, swallow the Commie line completely, much against our own interest? And when Chagla breaks out of the Government on the English issue, under whose auspices does he choose to make his first public statement? Why, the Commies again! Almost it seems whichever way you turn, the Commies are there." "But why would the P.M. be doing this? She must have some sense and she hasn't shown herself on the side of the Communists all the time," wondered the lecturer. "Well this fellow is an old friend, and you know her father's record in the matter of the protection and favouring of old friends, especially the more unworthy ones. Also she may be genuinely scared; these people in Government put on airs of omniscience and confidence, but they are as well aware as you and I that with the Communist Chinese nuclear programme going as it is now and we hiding our heads in the sand all the time, it will all be over with us as an independent country in five or six years. If she then has a friend in her Cabinet who is also very much persona grata with the victors, everything might go much more easily. She might even find herself at the head of the puppet satellite Government through which the Chinese Communist rulers would make their will felt by all of us. Insurance, my good academic, what do you say?" "You're a cynic, I won't believe any such thing. Thank God, there's the bus at last, now I needn't listen to you. But I tell you I shall feel on tenterhooks until this job is filled and I could almost pray that she may be led to choose not this awful fellow or even a lousy fellow-traveller, but a sensible, understand-

ing, live democrat," said the lecturer. "Well, here's wishing you and the country luck", said the journalist, as he settled himself in a corner seat and took out of his pocket the thin copy of the Apologia that was his bus reading for the first half of that week.

* * * *

The young lady in the bus leant forward and said to the middle-aged man in the seat before her, "excuse me, but what is this shanty town? It looks very ugly from this fine broad road here, doesn't it? Why do you have it? It isn't permanent, is it?" The man smiled, then sighed, "Yes I'm afraid it is. It wasn't there even ten years ago, but today, because nobody took action all these years, it's firmly established. Try to remove them now? No, not likely. Too many interests concerned, politicians, municipal members, boot-leggers, gamblers, the lower police, all who benefit in one way or another from the poor devils who live there—not so poor, too, quite a number of them, and devils, certainly, at least thirty per cent of them." "But tell me, how has this come about? I am very interested in urban development," said the young lady. "I took my degree in sociology, and though my home is in the far away Kumaon Hills, cities and their problems have always had a tremendous attraction for me." "Well, it's the usual story," said the middle-aged man wearily. "About fifty indigent unskilled families, they tell me, pour into this city every day. They come mostly from other states, some from this state too. Some of them in the past must have seen this likely looking spot, bang beside a broad road, light and water laid on, new installations coming up nearby, and settled down very modestly and quietly. Then came more and more and more. The original settlers, if tough, began to levy a fee for letting fresh people in, fixed up matters with such of the municipal or other staff that came anywhere near, tapped water surreptitiously from the main, ran off power illegally, put up stills etc., paid regular haptas or allowances to all likely to interfere, and were in a couple of years full citizens, voting rights entered in registers, visited by politicians and appealed to for their support at elections. Any time anybody pointed out they were encroachers on public land and should be removed, up would go a howl, 'Give them houses or leave them alone. How can you be so cruel, so heartless?' And processions with flags would march off to the nearest municipal office, or even to the secretariat led by politicians or trade-union leaders, who had been benefiting from them. So, these many blights upon the face of our fair city."

"You mean most of these people have no right to be on the land at all? It doesn't belong to them?" asked the young lady in amazement. "Exactly," said the other, "It is just as if I were to set up a small hut in a corner of your garden, use water from your garden tap, get electricity by quietly running an attachment from your porch light, gradually bring in my second and third cousins and village-people and settle them down too, and finally when you woke up to discover that half your garden was in my possession and ordered us out, tell you 'Well, yes, willingly, but then build us quarters to live in.'" "Oh, come, you're exaggerating, it

can't be as bad as that," said the young lady. "These encroachers could be got rid off all right, I'm sure. The authorities have just got to be a little firm." "You're quite right legally", said the middle-aged man. "But how often is a right not enforced, because the authorities just will not be firm. And, now, of course, where people from another state are concerned, they've got even stronger ground for doing nothing. Hasn't our good Prime Minister herself declared emphatically that an Indian has a right to live and practise his vocation anywhere in India ? Aren't these people Indians and aren't they practising their vocations, whatever they may be ? What more do you want ? No, no, state land, municipal land or private land, where they are, there they'll be allowed to stay. Anything else would bring the imperial wrath of great Delhi itself down on our meek Bombay government types." "You know you do Indira an injustice. I know her. She is very sensible and fair-minded. She couldn't possibly have meant to give support to this kind of thing." "Welcome is your view of her to a much-harassed citizen," said the man, "but the effect of her statement, true undoubtedly generally, is bound to be detrimental here. The trouble is, of course, all these great people just talk in general terms and never get down to cases." "Perfectly right," said an elderly lady who had been listening closely, "People pour in and in into this old city, and life becomes very difficult, congestion is terrible, all public facilities and amenities deteriorate immensely. But who cares ? Let more people come and still more. They're all Indians, aren't they ? And if they haven't work, never mind. Let them still come. They can always become bootleggers' assistants or gamblers or prostitutes' touts. This is sheer madness. I've had a house here for forty years, my father had it before me. Never has everything pressed on one so much as now. Just the crowds are enough to dizzy you. And the crime, the illicit liquor drinking, the quarrelsomeness of people, the total absence of manners. It's the bad example the government sets I think. We're no longer the decent, honourable people we were." "Well," said the young lady, "I don't know about that. Take this busful, you wouldn't say there was much wrong with us, would you ? But I'll certainly tell Indira when I meet her about the pouring in of unbearable crowds of the unskilled into Bombay, the blight on the city it puts in the shape of these ugly settlements, and how she oughtn't to do anything by her words to create the impression that she is opposed to action being taken against illegal encroachers merely because they come from outside the state. We're all Indians, certainly, and therefore all the more reason why there should be harmonious development everywhere and not just great frightful wens becoming bigger and uglier. Ah, this is my stop coming, good-bye, all," and the young lady briskly got off, the middle-aged gentleman saying audibly to himself, "No, there isn't much wrong with her. Would more of our young people were like that, intelligent, interested and serious !" Then realising he was talking aloud to himself, he looked round shame-facedly, only to encounter a kindly smile from the elderly lady and smile in return himself.

MY DAYS WITH KRISHNA MENON

KHUSWANT SINGH

(Continued from the issue of 29-8-1967)

AS High Commissioner Menon was king of India House and the most important Indian in Great Britain. Although this was a great booster of his morale, his vanity was often hurt now that he had also to meet many people more important than he. He devised ways to hold the centre of the stage.

The first Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference was much publicized in the British press. Menon, despite his closeness to Nehru, was not taken much notice of. He disliked being, as he himself described, "a shadow of Nehru". He called conferences at India House at odd hours. One Sunday 20 or more of us were summoned on "urgent" business. We were plied with cups of tea but none of us discovered the nature of the business for which we had been assembled. Every 15 minutes Menon's brows would pucker with irritation and he would announce, "It's a damned nuisance, lunch! There is so much work to do and I have to motor 50 miles to look at food I can't eat". The lunch he referred to was given by the Mountbattens to Mr. Nehru and the Attlees in their country home at Romney. So it went on till it was nearly one o'clock and his staff was in a high state of agitation. Menon went. He was almost an hour late. But he did keep Nehru, the Attlees and the Mountbattens waiting for him. Menon made unpunctuality a rule of his life. Being late always attracts more attention than being punctual.

A somewhat different episode was a lunch with Sir Arthur Rank. Rank's organization was planning to make a film on the Taj Mahal; their P.R.O., Mr. Finney, had given me several excellent lunches and wanted his boss to meet Menon to broach the question of facilities the Indian government would provide for shooting the film.

There was considerable excitement in the office, particularly among the bevy of stenographers, when Sir Arthur Rank's heavily embossed invitation card was received. It was assumed that Menon would be delighted to go. But Menon was unpredictable. He announced the invitation at a staff meeting and added that he could not afford to waste his time on film-makers, film stars and their ilk. Everyone protested; with great difficulty we prevailed upon Menon to accept. He gave us to understand that it was only for our sakes that he had accepted what would inevitably be a very boring lunch. For the next few days the subject of Rank's lunch was brought up by some device or the other and how the reluctant "H.E." had been made to accept—"You see, he's not one bit interested in meeting beautiful film stars. He's only going as a part of his duty".

The day arrived. Three other members of the staff to whom the invitation had been extended accompanied Menon in his Rolls Royce to the Dorchester Hotel where Sir Arthur Rank had a suite of rooms. We were received by Finney, taken up to the suite and introduced to some producers and script-writers. There were no glamorous stars; it was a stag lunch. We looked around for Sir Arthur Rank. Finney saw our questioning looks. "Sir Arthur will be in any moment. Won't you have a drink in the other room?" He herded us into a large octagonal room where the lunch table was laid out and a waiter handed round drinks. Finney went back to the other room and knocked at a door on the side. I followed Finney to tell him that Menon was an impatient, touchy sort of person and should not be kept waiting. Before I could get to Finney, the door on which he had knocked opened and an officious voice demanded, "Yes?"

"Sir, the High Commissioner is here."

"Who?"

"The High Commissioner for India, Mr. Menon."

"What the devil is he doing here?"

"We've invited him for lunch."

"What on earth for?"

"Sir," whispered Finney fiercely, "it's about that film on the Taj Mahal; we thought . . ."

"Oh yes, that Indian film business. Okey-doke. I'll join you in a second."

A much-relieved Finney announced to us that Sir Arthur was on his way. A minute later the great film magnate made his appearance. He was wreathed in smiles and welcomed Menon. "Mr. High Commissioner, it's a great pleasure and a privilege to have you here."

Menon extended his paw for a brief shake and then relapsed into a sullen silence. It was obvious the two great men were utterly bored with each other. The lunch was kept going by Finney and I cracking meaningless jokes at the top of our voices. (The modern P.R.O. is a reincarnation of the court jester of medieval times.) As soon as the coffee was finished Menon got up. "I must get back to my work. Thank you, Mr. Rank. (He did not use titles on principle.) If you need any assistance, my P.R.O. will look after you." Sir Arthur was as keen to speed the parting guest as the guest was to take his leave. "Thanks for coming. My P.R.O. and yours are friends. They can settle the business between themselves."

The film on the Taj was never made.

One of the memorable Menon episodes was at Dublin when he went to present his credentials as the Indian Ambassador to the Irish Republic. He took with him his three Defence Service Advisors and myself. My wife was asked to be in the party to look after the social engagements.

India was the first country to open a full-fledged embassy in Ireland; the Irish government had consequently planned quite an elaborate

tamasha. We did not know the details except for the luncheons and dinners we had agreed to inflict on each other.

On the morning in question, my telephone rang. It was Menon. His voice was barely audible; he asked me to come to his room at once. I found him in a state of collapse. "I am very sick", he groaned. "You'll have to cancel the arrangements for the presentation of credentials."

I was aghast. Before I could protest he spoke more fiercely. "Don't you see I am very ill? I can't go through with it! Ring up the Chief of Protocol. Give me those pills and a tumbler of water."

I handed him his pills and the water. He swallowed a couple and fell into a sort of stupor. I thought I'd wait a while to see if he were really ill before I sent for a doctor or rang up the protocol people.

I looked out of the window onto the square. A squad of motor-cycle police drew up noisily outside the hotel. I opened the window to get a better look. The roar of the motor-cycle engines fell on Menon's ears. He opened one eye and asked, "What is that racket?"

"A motor-cycle squad. I suppose to escort your car to the President's palace."

Menon shut his eyes. His face was a little more mobile than it had been five minutes before.

I saw a troop of Irish guards turn the corner and march towards the hotel. Menon also heard the tramp of marching feet come to a halt beneath the window and the words of command to stand at ease. He opened both his eyes this time and enquired what the new noise was about. "Regiment of Irish Guards", I replied. "They will probably form a procession."

Menon was positively interested and sat up in bed.

"Shall I ring up the Chief of Protocol?" I asked.

"Give me another five minutes", he replied. "If I don't feel any better, we'll have to call it off."

The sound of bagpipes assailed our ears. I looked out of the window. "What is that now?" demanded Menon.

"Irish Highlanders."

The bagpipes fell silent. A brass band took its place and came to a crashing halt beneath the window. Menon leaped out of his bed with the agility of a panther and took a long look at the motor-cyclists, the guards and the Highlanders. He limped back to bed. "I suppose it is my duty to go. I'll feel better after a bath. Go and see if the others are ready."

Half an hour later Menon emerged from his room looking very spruce in his black *sherwani*, white *chooridars* and his ivory-handled cane. We lined ourselves beside him.

It was "Roses Roses all the way" through the streets of Dublin with Menon waving from his open car to the cheering crowds that thronged the pavements.

In the morning Menon presented his credentials to the President. The

ceremony was followed by an official reception where the Diplomatic Corps and members of Parliament including Mr. Eamon de Valera, then leader of the opposition were present. In the afternoon Dr. Douglas (the President) invited Menon to a quiet cup of tea. This time only my wife and I accompanied him.

We were received by the President in his study. It was a dark, oak-panelled room lined with books. The chairs and sofas were upholstered in leather; a peat fire smouldered in the chimney. The room had a sombre, peaceful atmosphere in which Dr. Douglas's pipe seemed to be most appropriate. Menon was ill at ease in this old world of sedate sophistry. Over a cup of tea and scones—it had to be scones—Dr. Douglas asked Menon how India was doing since its independence. Menon launched on a breathless narration of India's mineral wealth, her enormous potential, the first Five-Year Plan naming the hydro-electric projects in various parts of the country, and the millions and millions of kilowatts of electricity they would be producing. He gave figures of export of raw material in precise tons and prices of half-finished manufactures in sterling and dollars. This went on at a rapid pace for a good ten minutes with the President listening patiently and smoking his pipe. Menon realised that he had been somewhat inept in utilising a polite enquiry to lecture on Indian economics. To make up for the error he asked Dr. Douglas, "And Mr. President, how is Ireland's economy doing? How are the exports? Do you have a favourable balance of trade?"

Dr. Douglas got his opening and he slipped his rapier in with the deftness which only an Irishman could have deployed. "Mr. Ambassador, we never have a favourable balance of trade," he drawled as he put his pipe away. "You see, we don't have very much to sell. Our exports (if you can call them by the name) are invisible exports—dramatists, poets, writers and that sort of thing. Nothing you can calculate precisely in terms of money."

There were lighter moments in the life at India House. Menon's puckish sense of humour contributed to some. I particularly recall the "reception" we arranged for Mrs. Pandit, who was then Indian Ambassador in Washington. It was common knowledge that she and Menon did not get along. Mrs. Pandit was due to stop in London for twenty-four hours on her way to India. Menon was anxious to prevent her meeting Indians hostile to him and letting her gather anti-Menon material to transmit to her brother the Prime Minister. Many Indian organizations hostile to Menon had written to her (some unwittingly through India House) asking for an opportunity to meet her. Mrs. Pandit had forwarded these letters to us so that we would arrange the interviews. We replied to them politely, stating that we would do our best to fit them in Mrs. Pandit's busy programme. A week before her arrival, there was a meeting of the "inner cabinet" in Menon's room and we decided to arrange a "busy programme" for her. We rang up British Cabinet Ministers saying that Mrs. Pandit was most anxious to see them before she returned to Delhi to discuss matters with her brother the Prime

Minister. So we arranged lunch, tea, cocktail and dinner party followed by late-night theatre.

Mrs. Pandit's plane landed at Heathrow in the morning. A crowd of Indians hostile to Menon were present at the airport. We secured permission from the authorities to take the car up to the plane. The High Commissioner's Rolls Royce flying the tri-colour drew up alongside the aircraft. Mrs. Pandit was delighted at the distinction. She was whisked away from the airport without even seeing the demonstrators. By the time they chased her down to Claridges Hotel we had taken her away to fulfil her first engagement. We told her how anxious many British statesmen were to meet her. So it went on till after midnight. Next morning she was hauled out of bed and deposited in her seat on the plane bound for India. She did not meet anyone we did not want her to meet.

Letters of protest followed her to India. She realized that she had been tricked. Her mood was dark. On her way back to Washington, she refused to allow India House to arrange any appointments for her. She accepted an invitation of the Indian Journalists Association who arranged a press conference in her room in Claridges. Once more Menon outwitted her. He told her bluntly that she had no business to meet the press in London without consulting him. England was his domain. Mrs. Pandit gave in. She had to suffer meeting the journalists under my auspices and the best she could do was to vent her spleen on me.

* * * *

I was often asked whether Menon was a Communist. At first I used to react angrily. "So what! Many of the great freedom fighters of our country were Communists." Later it became a sort of freemasonry which helped its members irrespective of merit. Menon may or may not have been a card-bearing member of the Party, but his partiality towards those who were assumed scandalous proportions.

A large number of his English friends were Communists. That did not surprise me because the Communists had been more outspokenly sympathetic towards Indian aspirations than any other political group. Many had worked for the India League. Some expected to be rewarded —and were.

During Menon's tenure as High Commissioner quite a few Communists, both British and Indian, were given employment in India House. In the P.R.O. department of which I was in charge for a number of years there were quite a few Communists. Menon's bias in their favour can be gauged from the following episode.

One part of my job as head of the department was to write confidential reports on my staff every year. To the best of my recollection in the three or four annual reports I made I gave only two clerks, an Englishwoman and an Indian, adverse reports and recommended their dismissal. The Englishwoman was in the habit of coming an hour late, spending an inordinate time at coffee, lunch and tea breaks and left the

office early to "avoid the rush hour". I had many occasions to pull her up and tell her that on many days she did no more than half-an-hour's work. She took no notice and was often cheeky. The Indian woman, who was a friend of the other, followed her example except that instead of cheek she became abjectly humble and shed tears.

Menon had no direct contact with these women; he hardly knew their names. He had no basis whatsoever of knowing how they worked or behaved in office. But every year Menon accepted my staff report, save in the case of these two women. When I left, he promoted them over the heads of others. Both these women were members of the Communist Party. Other heads of department told me that they had similar experience.

Was Menon corrupt? Personally never. But many of his friends to whom he entrusted the government's money were manifestly so. And he did not hesitate to take money from dubious characters for the India League and its many satellite organizations. During Menon's tenure as High Commissioner the League and its offsprings acquired valuable real estate in the heart of London.

Standing by old friends was a strong trait in Menon's character. Thus he had befriended a humble cook from Malabar who bore the same name. Despite adverse reports against him, he was put in charge of India House cooking with the high sounding title "Canteen Officer". This Menon was given to the bottle—and the number of bottles he consumed kept him chronically in the red. He played ducks and drakes with the Canteen money and on more than one occasion staggered into office in a state of intoxication. (At a cocktail party given to a visiting ambassador, Menon the cook gave the Ambassador's wife a friendly pinch on her bottom.) He was often reprimanded, but not fired till after Menon ceased to be High Commissioner.

Affairs of the India League and its branch organizations could very well do with some scrutiny. Many a visiting Maharajah and industrialist was entertained at India House and then asked to donate money for a students hostel or a club. In one case—that of a crook of the name of K. S. B. Ahlawalia who at different times passed off as a naval officer, a Brigadier, a prince and had done his stint in Indian and British goals—Menon's own role was not above-board. He accepted a donation for India League from Ahlawalia (in full knowledge of his past and that money being given was not his) and in return recommended him to the Liberal Party of Great Britain as a candidate for Parliament: the Liberals were anxious to put up a coloured man. When details of Ahlawalia's criminal career came to light, it embarrassed everyone concerned save Menon. "We do not have to know his past, do we?" he said to me nonchalantly when I brought him a sheaf of press clippings on the subject.

Menon did not set any store by truth: he considered truth to be the monopoly of fools who did not have the wits to tell a convincing falsehood. I rarely heard him give a straight answer to a straight question. His instinctive reaction to any question was to question the motive of

the questioner and then tailor his reply in such a way as to impugn the motive and also serve his own ends. This exercise called for a certain amount of skill and cunning. Most people confused this skill and cunning with ability. There never was any creative ability in Menon.

My own career as Menon's P.R.O. came to a swift and deserved end. He never thought very highly of my ability: he never thought of anyone having any brains except himself. To any statement made by anyone Menon's first reaction used to be, "You do not understand". In my own case he did to me what he had made me do to others.

Kashmir was very much in the news and Menon decided that the Indian point of view should be put across in the form of letters in the press. Issue was taken on an editorial in the Manchester Guardian. A letter was drafted by the First Secretary, P. N. Haksar, now secretary to the Prime Minister, to be sent to the paper under my name. I acquiesced and signed it without demur. The Pakistani P.R.O. replied. In this process three or four letters appeared under my name—none of which I had written. There was nothing in them which I or anyone of my assistants could not have put across—and perhaps in better language; nevertheless I had to suffer the indignity of being told that I did not know my job.

The next step was to have press conferences where I was invited as a spectator. The third was to send for my assistants and communicate orders to me through them. I was familiar with the pattern and knew that my days were numbered. I waited for the opportunity to bring matters to a head. I did not have to wait long.

I do not recall the precise details but it had something to do with "Miss Singh" conveying "H.E.'s" instructions to my assistant Jamal Kidwai, destined to be my successor. I pulled her up. She complained to Menon. I was summoned by Menon and asked to apologise to Miss Singh. My response surprised Menon. I was rude to both, slapped my resignation on his table and marched out of the office.

Menon could not believe anyone could resign government service: that was why he took the liberty of being rude to the seniormost of the I.C.S. and other services. I was re-summoned in office and told that he would ignore my notice. I told him that I had already posted a copy of the notice to the Ministry and asked for three months leave due to me. And that I did not propose to come to the office from the next day and did not give a damn either for him or the Government of India.

This time Menon believed that I meant what I said. His tone changed from bullying to whining. He recounted all that he had done for me; he described me as one of his friends. But my cup of bitterness was full to the brim. "You have no friends", I told him. They were the last words I spoke to him.

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FOOD AND WORDS, WORDS AND FOOD

Slack breasts and udders
don't always call for
hormonal therapy
—they may speak of drought too.
The drifting monotony of wind and sand
the static boredom of the sun
is too much for me
I walk into the oasis of his words.

You could call it a colloquium
where rice strains and jap methods
and wheat hybrids are under focus.
He adjusts his buttocks
—they are too wide for the chair
He smoothes the folds of his khadi kurta
the tone even, the voice mellow
"Ahimsa is a positive creed . . .
We will not submit to aggression . . .
We condemn the statement made
by the fifth Secretary of Tanzania
to the Bolivian Minister for Urinary Affairs
. . . We condemn aparthied
. . . We will not have food
with strings tagged on to it . . .
We are all for local dialects
Each town will have a script
Each state will have a lingo . . ."
Within the empty belly
the enzymes turn multi-lingual
their speech vociferous
simmering on stomach walls.

If only the earth were edible
we would have eaten it
eaten the planet we live on
But that would be only
stalling for time
Within ten years
they would be shipping earth to us
dock workers would strike again
cheaper tramways/
better wages/more wives/
—anything could be the cause.

"I repeat," he screams, "no one
obliges us by sending food!
They are duty-bound; the over-fed
must feed the under-fed; that's the
essence of the flow of things".
It is a wonder he doesn't
refer to osmosis!
He smoothes the folds of his Kurta instead
He readjusts his wounded dignity.
We listen reverently
head bowed, ears attentive
He is an old leader after all
who has gone thrice to jail
—twice for home-rule
and once for sodomy.

—K. N. Daruwalla

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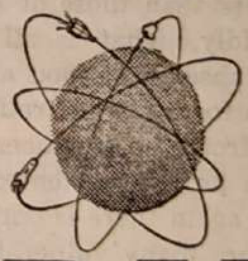

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FOOD AND THE COOPERATIVES

B. VENKATAPPIAH

(Being part of a talk in Delhi on 16-12-1966)

FOOD and cooperatives are obviously both of great importance for the country's economy and its economic organisation as a whole. At the same time, they are of special significance to the rural sector. It is in this sector that food is grown and cooperatives increasingly provide credit and marketing. In both instances—the provision of food and the operation of cooperatives—the people involved are millions of peasants. We imported cooperation from the West more than 60 years ago, because we thought that cooperative credit was good for food and agriculture. Today, ironically, we are importing food. Something has gone wrong somewhere. We have not made adequate progress indigenously either with food or with cooperation. I suggest this requires looking into. May be, we have adopted policies not sufficiently applicable to the rural sector and not sufficiently adaptable to the varying conditions of different parts of the country.

Food, in this country, is more frequently adulterated with politics than with any other commodity. The more important the issue of food—as in times of scarcity—the greater the adulteration with politics. This adulteration takes place at different levels: international, national, and parochial. To the extent we are dependent on food from the United States, food is mixed up with international politics and international policies: our own no less than those of America. At the national level, elections bring out vividly, what is all the time evident, that food nourishes man, but the absence of food nourishes the politician. If Government does not obtain food it is in trouble. If, in order to obtain food, it attempts to procure from the producer, it is again in trouble. If the consumer gets less than he is accustomed to or if one set of consumers gets more than another, again there is opportunity for a first rate political squabble. Thus, there are many vulnerable points on the political plane all along the journey of food from the farmer to the consumer. And at the State or parochial level there are politics involved in the surplus State parting or not parting with food and at the deficit State girding its loins—or not doing so—to procure as much as it can from its own internal resources.

If politics feeds on food, it preys on cooperatives. This is particularly so at the panchayat level. To give but one instance, in some States—whether with the consent of the Planning Commission or not, I do not know—the cooperatives were reorganised so as to coincide completely or become congruent, with the panchayat. If the panchayat changed, the

cooperatives would also change to maintain this congruence. It was almost like the case of the twins of whom one is supposed to have said, "When I died, the neighbours came and buried brother John." In some cases, it was the cooperatives that got buried because the panchayats had misbehaved.

It is true that we now have tremendous opportunities—much more than ever in the past—for cooperatives. It is very necessary that, in the process of their being strengthened, the cooperatives are not destroyed by spoon-feeding, slogan-mongering and so forth. Where a certain minimum growth is necessary, there may indeed be need for some assistance and patronage from the State. But this has to be restricted to what is strictly necessary for enabling the cooperative to stand on its own legs. It should not be forgotten that cooperation is also a certain form of organisation and that, once it becomes viable, it should gear itself to competition with other forms of organisation. There should be very restricted contexts, if any, in which cooperatives are given an absolute monopoly of any particular line of economic functioning. In credit, for example, it is clear that State policies aimed at strengthening cooperatives but not at giving them a monopoly. It is one thing to create a monopoly for a particular form of organisation by various legislative and administrative steps but it is another thing for a form of organisation, by its own efforts, to oust others and in effect enjoy a monopoly. Cooperatives need to be strengthened. It is to be hoped that they will be strengthened to the extent of being the predominant economic organisation in many spheres. The means of strengthening may, for example, be subsidy. But not, except in the most exceptional circumstances, the shutting out of competition. I should not like to be misunderstood. A particular commodity, e.g., a special type of fertiliser, may be in acute short supply. If so, there may not be much point in dividing it between different distributors. It may be entrusted to only one agency ; and it may well happen that that agency is the cooperative. But this is not a monopoly for the set purpose of strengthening the cooperatives ; it is a monopoly for a particular agency dictated by the compulsion of circumstances.

Turning next to the more extended activities and scope of cooperatives, I have a few observations to make. There was and there still is a tremendous scope for the development of long-term credit cooperatives as one of the instruments for a real long-term agricultural development plan in India. Let us not, in our anxiety and preoccupation with the production of food and its distribution, which are no doubt important, forget that all this should be a part of a much longer plan, say for 5, 10 or 15 years, in which to get the best out of our land. In this context, one has to examine whether there are funds available for this purpose and, if they are, through what channels the funds can be made available. Here, I think, cooperatives of the long-term type in conjunction with others have a tremendous opportunity. So far as the more immediate tasks of production and distribution of food are concerned, the opportunities that

the cooperatives have already had will now be multiplied many times, for the whole tempo will be such if the Government really means business in the matter of stepping up food production, distribution, procurements, and so on. Connected with the production of food, two things need to be done, which will provide many opportunities for cooperatives. One is the provision of credit to help food to be produced and the other, the distribution of fertilisers, pesticides, agricultural machinery. Both credit and other impetus will have to be disbursed in much greater volume and at a much quicker pace than at present when the high-yielding varieties are to be grown on a large scale. Again, cooperatives will have a big part to play in the context of distribution. But there seems to be no doubt that public distribution, which today takes care of 10 to 12 million tons, will, for some time to come, have to be much further expanded. Lastly, in between the growing and the distribution of food, there is the procurement of food which also provides a wide scope for cooperatives, though this is limited by the policies actually in force today.

The seed of co-operation, as I have said, was originally imported. Unfortunately that seed was of a high-yielding variety only insofar as it concerned the number of societies that were registered. The task that awaits us is to increase the quality and—if necessary for the purpose—reduce the number.

"The way of the world is to make laws, but follow customs."

* * * *

"Do not accustom yourself to consider debt only as an inconvenience; you will find it a calamity."

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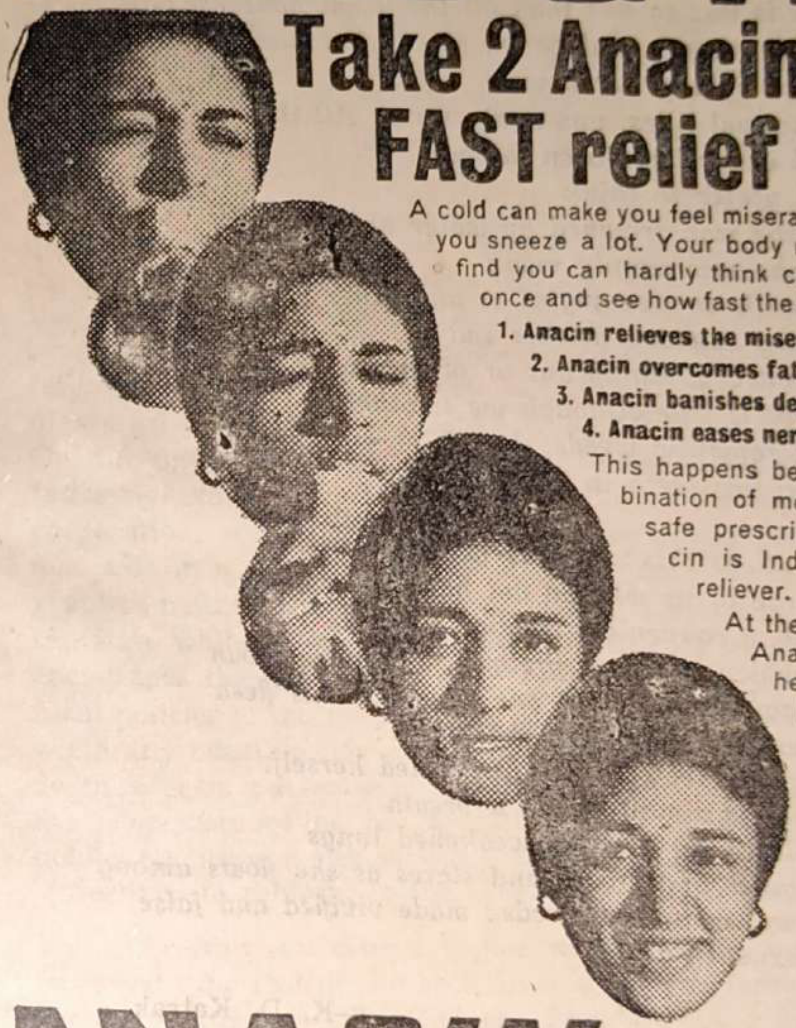

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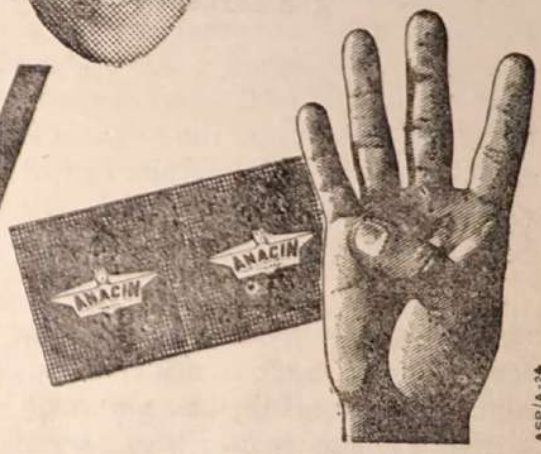

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OPHELIA

(After reading the poem by Arthur Rimbaud)

There is less to her than all the usual nonsense:
Weeds, drapery and gown, fish in her hair,
Time weighing her down,
Phantasmal lilies, unworldly tunes. All this
Could easily have been the case,
But I prefer to think
That she was drowned by water not by love
That she was simply mad;
Her death as meaningful as any other
Ordinary suicide: neither sad
Nor contrary, significant or otherwise.
And this is true although we smother
Her in romantic weeds, though every young
Poet try his teeth in her.

The truth is this: she has become a voice
For those of us who do not have their own;
A myth, a convenient symbol, a device
With which to shout, pretend to sing, or moan
Our vague heroics. At one time she was flesh
And had the dignity of real death:
A simple blueblood who had killed herself.
Now she is diminished to a breath
Articulated by a poet's weakened lungs
And smiles and croons and stares as she floats among
Her small contrived weeds: made vivified and false
And sexual in death.

—K. D. Katrak

LIFE WITH GIANTS

ECONOMICUS

ECONOMIC theory has long been the favourite hunting ground of the mathematician, in his lighter moments. There is a certain aesthetic charm about marginal cost and and revenue curves, indifference maps and model building quite apart from the fact that geometry and calculus bestow on this science a certain illusory accuracy which it badly needs. Everybody has known all the time that men, firms or prices do not behave quite in this well disciplined manner. It has been pointed out time and again, and readily enough conceded, that economic variables behave with the abandon of beatniks and hippies. Nevertheless the orderly world of representative firms and gimlet-eyed entrepreneurs who continue unfailingly to bring marginal costs in line with marginal revenues and thus maximize profits still looks solid enough beyond the disorderly fringes. Or, did, until the appearance of John Kenneth Galbraith's book *The New Industrial State* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. Price : $6.95). The modern corporation, says Galbraith, does not maximize profit ; it neither buys nor sells in a competitive market ; it cannot take consumer demand for granted, neither can it afford to allow the demand to take its own course ; the state while paying lip service to anti-trust legislation allows or even encourages the large corporation to thrive by tailoring its economic and fiscal policies to the needs of the corporation ; the stock-holders no longer wield any effective power over the appointment of the management nor do they seem particularly anxious to want to do so. For, in general, the large corporation has acquitted itself well and neither the stockholder nor anyone else seriously wants to queer its pitch merely because it declines to conform to the economist's model of a typical firm !

Galbraith's latest book begins with a sparkling, charmingly witty foreword ; the rest of the book lives up to the foreword. The book, not a sister volume to "The Affluent Society" but a parent born after its offspring, explores the world of giant corporations. The big corporations have made it necessary for us to revise many of our most firmly entrenched ideas in the field of economics. Everything Galbraith has said may not be brand new but what was merely hinted as an occasional inconvenience has now been pieced together into an integrated theory. The total effect is startling.

During the last 70 years there have been important changes in the industrial scene. The big corporations, no longer confined to oil, petroleum utilities, mining, etc., are now operating and producing all manner of products. Five hundred of the largest corporations produce half of the United States' total goods and services. These corporations are no longer run by Fords and Carnegies. Their Chairmen are unknown people.

Effective management rests, not with those who own large chunks of stock but with persons selected by the Board of Directors, 'who narcissistically get themselves selected'! There has been a decline in the power of the ordinary stock-holder since the stock is very widely dispersed. The real power rests with what Galbraith describes as the 'techno-structure' which consists of executives, administrative heads, scientists, engineers, salesmen and other experts along with the Board of Directors itself. It is the groups of committees and sub-committees into which these experts form themselves that take the real decisions that matter such as whether to launch a new model of a car or an aeroplane. A major project takes anything from 2/3 years to complete. The corporation cannot allow the product to be put at the mercy of unbridled market forces when a billion dollars have been spent in the new design and its launching. The market forces must be controlled and bent so that the model can be launched, otherwise all the expenditure and effort would be wasted. This requires extensive research and advance planning not only in the corporation but on the part of the State as well. Leaving projects of this nature to their fate is not in the interest of any one including the society and the State. Irrespective of the existing anti-Trust legislation, etc. Galbraith, therefore, comes to the conclusion that the actual conditions prevailing in the United States support the existence and development of large corporations rather than hinder it.

To the three classical factors of production, land, labour and capital Knight and others added a fourth, viz., entrepreneurship, a few years ago. With the emergence of the big corporations there is a fifth factor which must be taken into account to explain what is happening in the economy. Reliance on the four older factors of production is no longer capable of giving correct answers to a host of problems which crop up in economic analysis. To understand what is happening in the industrialised countries we must follow the outline of the developed world as redrawn by Galbraith.

The modern economy consists of three distinct parts: the technically dynamic, massively capitalised and organised corporations, thousands of small and traditional proprietors and a large and growing Government Sector which controls a sizeable segment of the entire economic activity. There has been a gigantic increase in the size of typical manufacturing enterprise, its capital base, employment potential and the period of gestation of its products. The Ford Motor Company had 125 persons on its rolls in 1903 and the production cost of launching a new model around that time was under $100,000. The technology moreover was very much simpler so that, had the model failed to catch on the company could have without much loss produced a differently designed car (or for that matter a motor cycle). The Ford Motor Company had 317,000 workmen on its rolls in 1964; a new model launched that year had taken 3 years to perfect. The styling cost was $9 million and tooling costs totalled $50 million. These features of the technological change, larger span of time required,

increased capital needs, inflexibility of commitment, specialised manpower and organisation, the need for foresight in planning and for conditioning customers, require an environment in which the market can be made to adapt itself to the manufacturer rather than the other way around. The market economy in the old sense ceases to be reliable and the preferences of the consumer must either be anticipated months or years in advance or the consumer must be persuaded to appreciate what is being offered to him. Modern technology has its own inflexible logic: a country may choose not to produce jet aircraft, nuclear power plants or even modern automobiles but it must not ask that these products —products which are the end-results of highly refined and complicated technology—be produced by firms which are subject to unfixed prices and unmanaged demand. The power of making decisions, in this set up, no longer rests with a single man—the entrepreneur. It has passed to a new factor of production—the association of men of diverse technical knowledge, experience or other talent which modern technology and planning require. Group decisions unless reversed by another group tend to become absolute. (That is to say no single person is omniscient enough to reverse a decision taken by experts in diverse fields. For instance, if the chairman does not agree with the decision he would usually have to consult yet another group of experts.) Where this condition is not fulfilled and there is interference either by a jealous Chairman unwilling to give up power or by the State, the effect is usually disastrous. (In the thirties and forties when Henry Ford and Sewell Avery resisted their loss of authority their companies promptly began to make losses.)

Control by one or two individuals is ruled out automatically by the mammoth size of the modern corporation. In 1962 five largest corporations of U.S.A. had combined assets of $36 billion (Rs. 27,000 crores) or over 12 per cent of all assets used in manufacturing. Corporations with assets of over $10 million (nearly Rs. 2,000 crores) owned around 80 per cent of all resources in U.S.A. General Motors has an income of $20.7 billion (equal to India's G.N.P.) or 1/5 of the Federal Income of the U.S.A. The growth in size, unlike the tenets of classical economic theory, does not reflect economies of scale, but rather, the needs of large-scale planning. It also means independence from stock-holders, suppliers of capital (initial, or for expansion). The large corporation is a monopsony where buying materials and labour is concerned and a monopoly in regard to the sale of its products. However, corporations do not expand to this size because they have monopolistic ambitions but because extensive planning is otherwise impossible.

Instead of the community (or the State) being antagonistic to the giant corporation there is a clearly identifiable commensalism between the two. This arises from the very nature of the technostructure. The community's main concern is that production should be high and efficient which depends on proper 'motivation' of the workers. In the middle ages when capital was in short supply and the principal factor of

production was land what induced the serfs and landless labourers to produce, the motivating force behind production, was compulsion. Historically, as the use of capital became more extensive compulsion was replaced by pecuniary gain as the main motivation. The technostructure, in contrast, is motivated by the need for 'adaptation' and 'identification'. The goals of a mature corporation will be a reflection of the goals of the technostructure and the goals of society will tend to be those of the corporation. The majority of the people in the U.S. believe that General Motors does serve a nationally useful purpose. This in turn tends to help keep the morale of the executives and the workmen of the corporation high. The reason why the American industrial system (with its oligopolistic price fixing) is considered efficient (although oligopoly itself is not) is that price fixation is an essential ingredient of planning. Modern technology reduces the reliability of the market and it increases the commitments of time and capital which are required in production. For this reason prices cannot be left to the vagaries of the unmanaged market. Stable prices reflect the need for security against price competition. Since prices of one firm are costs of another, fixed prices over long periods facilitate planning.

Having established the dependence of the big corporations on planning. Galbraith goes on to explain the interrelationship between prices, costs, wages and employment in the modern setting and between the corporations and the Government. The corporations depend on the State for regulation of aggregate demand and for stability of wages and prices. It follows that unless the public sector has a sizeable hold on the economy and the resources (defence contracts, space research, civil aviation, etc.) it will not be able to create conditions necessary for the smooth operation of the corporations. Normally the relationship between Government and the large corporations is free from friction. Disputes as between U.S. Steel and Kennedy's administration are few and far between. Similarly, the corporation in general finds it far less easy to deploy its funds for political purposes than the old fashioned entrepreneur.

As regards labour, Galbraith argues that Trade Unionism tends to become weaker in the modern system ; unskilled employment falls and trade disputes are fewer. (In an aside it is argued that labour's distrust of automation might well be sound.) The need for highly trained technicians and scientists grows simultaneously with the size of the corporations and the organisational chart is shaped more like a vase with a tapering base than the usual 'squat pyramid'. The result is not exactly an earthly paradise for the ordinary workmen ; but neither has the pattern any identifiable similarity with Karl Marx's picture of a typical capitalist society. The Marxist thesis of inexorable profit maximization, continuous reduction of money wage until it equals marginal productivity at the point of maximum employment and finally overthrow of capitalism seems as unrealistic as ever under the foregoing conditions.

That is not to say that all that has happened in the U.S.A. and comparable economies is for the best. Much of the industrial growth leads to unplanned urban development, unhealthy cities, polluted air and waterways and destruction of beauty and tranquillity. A Pigouesque Galbraith, in the last chapters of his book records all this damage to economic welfare—this disregard for the marginal social product, in his inimitable style, caustic, concise, witty. Some of the stuff should ultimately achieve the status of aphorism :

"Men of conservative temperament have long suspected that one thing leads to another" ; "A passenger in even a fast moving automobile is reasonably certain of keeping with it" ; "with no views is it so pleasant to agree in detail as with one's own. . . ."

For a book so refreshing and alive "The New Industrial State" has an excessive number of rather obscure passages. At times the strain of keeping pace with the author is considerable—the author is almost determined not to let the reader have it too easy. The chapters dealing with the relationship between modern business and the academic and scientific world appear like a graft which has not taken and somehow mar the unity of an undoubted classic.

What Galbraith has to say about Indian planning he has said elsewhere ("Economic Development", "Economic Planning in India", etc.). Here, his harsh comments on excessive parliamentary control, belief in official omnipotence, etc., are briefly assigned to Chapter IX "A Digression on Socialism". Any serious attempt to apply the Galbraith thesis to the Indian economy as such is likely to result in a degree of frustration. There is an unbridegeable gulf between the U.S. and the low-saving, high-planning Indian economy. The dissimilarities greatly outnumber the points of concurrence. The share of the public sector is of a comparable order of magnitude but that is about all.

The process of arriving at a point as distinct from the location is important in economics. The public sector in India has assumed its present size not as a result of the dynamics of natural growth but out of ideological conviction and conscious effort. It has its economic roots somewhat uncertainly anchored in the ground while in the absence of both the spur of competition and freedom from parliamentary control the trunk and the branches appear ill nourished and stunted. Whether in economic or international matters the U.S. has always started with a policy of non-intervention and ended up with arute involvement. The result has been by and large good. In international affairs we involve ourselves by talking too readily and too often about non-involvement. In economic matters the Government may yet discover it has interfered too much with the growth of the private sector without conspicuous success in the fields reserved for the public sector. The largest corporation in India (Hindustan Steel) is in the public sector and is just large enough to qualify for inclusion in the first two hundred corporations in the world, graded

according to size. The largest private corporation is Ta'a Iron and Steel which with its capital of Rs. 50 crores is a mere pigmy by world standards. Whatever the process by which the Indian corporations have arrived where they now are their future growth seems peculiarly dependent on savings other than those generated by themselves. Neither Tata Steel nor any of the bigger corporations are now capable of expanding on the strength of their own resources. At a rough guess about 80% of the capital required by the private sector now comes from public institutions such as the Life Insurance Corporation of India, Industrial Development Bank of India, Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India, Industrial Finance Corporation of India and lately Unit Trust of India. Even if we take two of these bodies, viz., Life Insurance Corporation of India and the Unit Trust they can between them hold 40% of the ordinary and preference stock of the various corporations. This should, in course of time, bring about an interesting shift in ownership and potential voting power. The corporations' dependence on the savings garnered by public bodies would soon be so complete as to make other financial and physical controls superfluous and suspicion and hostility towards their growth suicidal. Corruption whether it takes the form of generous assistance to election funds, suborning of politicians and officials or cornering of licences must, of course, be fought with ad hoc remedies, but the baby of economic efficiency must not be thrown out with the bathwater of political graft.

If 'The New Industrial State' has a moral it is that economic shibboleths are as dangerous as political ones.

"A sound economy is a sound understanding brought into action. It is calculation realised ; it is the doctrine of proportion reduced to practice ; it is forseeing contingencies and providing against them ; it is expecting contingencies and being prepared for them."

* * * *

"All despotism is bad ; but the worst is that which works with the machinery of freedom."

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GLASS

I went to him for half an hour
As pure woman, pure misery.
Fragile glass, breaking,
Crumbling. . . .

* * * *

The house was silent in the heat,
Only the old rafters creaking.
He drew me to him
Rudely

With a lover's haste, an armful
Of splinters, designed to hurt, and,
Pregnant with pain. Why
Did I

Not cry then, broken glass, beware ?
Why did I not tell him then that
I no longer care
Whom I

Hurt with love and often without ?
With a cheap toy's indifference
I enter others'
Lives, and

Make of every trap of lust
A temporary home. On me their
Strumming fingers shall
Revive
The fond melodies of a past.
I give a wrapping to their dreams,
A woman-voice
And a

Woman-smell. I do not bother
To tell : I've misplaced a father
Somewhere, and I look
For him now everywhere.

—Kamala Das

INDIA'S NEGROES

TOM McARTHUR

"The Hindu civilisation was created by a people who were acutely conscious of their fair complexion in contrast to the dark skin of the autochthons, and their greatest pre occupation was how to maintain the pristine purity of the bloodstream which carried this colour. *Varna* or colour was the central principle round which Hindu society organised itself, and the orthodox Hindu scriptures know no greater crime than miscegenation or, as they call it, *Varna-samkara*, the mixing of colour."

—Nirad C. Chaudhuri, "The Continent of Circe"

A POSTWAR myth that has collapsed in recent years is the one about Afro-Asian solidarity. The theme of this Bandung ballad was the unity of all browns, yellows and blacks against the overweening white races who had dominated them and had practised—uniquely—a virulent custom called the Colour Bar. The corollary of this theory was that no other race had ever discriminated on grounds of complexion and that the Afro-Asians were one big harmonious family representing true human values.

Nehru's India was in the forefront of the Afro-Asian idea and even today maintains economic sanctions against South Africa because of firm convictions on the matter of complexionism and apartheid in that country. Similarly, I can recall, from my days as a member of the Glasgow University International Club, how all the non-European students leagued themselves in theory against the white imperialists, while in practice the Asians held their socials in the Club premises, the Africans held theirs in the British Council building and the twain seldom met.

The passage of time and some years in India have not helped this memory to fade. Rather I've been pushed towards accepting it as showing how things really are in Afro-Asia, towards the conclusion that Indians, for instance, have been misleading themselves or the world *or both* in standing as the champions of race equality. Two points arise here:

(1) That Indians, educated or otherwise, on the whole do not enjoy African Negro company and in some cases go so far as to say how difficult it is even to touch a Negro (Chaudhuri again: "Most Hindus, especially women, have a feeling of physical repulsion from them which nothing can conquer"). S. K. Patil is quoted in the *Times of India* recently as saying that the present plight of overseas Indians arises from their never

having integrated with their adopted country and of having rather maintained their own caste differences more rigorously than at home.

(2) That India, despite protestations to the contrary, practised the oldest and most efficient system of racial apartheid in recorded history. This system of *Varna* should properly be translated into English as the Colour System.

Anthropologists agree that India has never at any time had a substantial Negroid population. By this they mean that people with absolute Negroid features—tightly curled hair, pouting lips, flaring nostrils and brown-to-black skins—are uncommon here; but this is not to deny that a vast population of brown-to-black complexion exists throughout the subcontinent.

Not long ago a film was shown in Bombay called *Main Bhi Ladki Hun*, in which Meena Kumari played the part of a bride whose complexion was not suitably fair. She was darkened for the part and had only managed the marriage by some sort of trick anyway. The family disdained her and her husband was confused. In one song she calls upon Krishna (*Krishna, O Kala Krishna!*) to help her, because he by his very name is "Black". One can contrast this film with the regular demands in marriage arrangement for "fair" brides and the unwillingness to see beauty in a girl whose complexion is nearer black than white. Conversely, extreme fairness (as of European women) is regarded as beauty itself, whatever the regularity or otherwise of features and figure. A friend of ours, a young woman, was asked by her uncle what she thought of his son's proposed bride. The girl did not want to express an opinion. She was pressed. She said, "Well, she's not very goodlooking." The uncle was annoyed at this and cried: "Who are you to talk with your black face?" This, the girl assured me, is a typical reaction to darker skins in the Gujarati Banya community.

These would be small points if they were not magnified in the whole social spectrum of India. References to blackness are insulting and "kala admi" a term of abuse. It seems to me therefore that before we study and comment too sharply on the troubles in Newark and Detroit, it might be salutary to study a few observers nearer home. I take Chaudhuri once more because he is a controversial writer:

"Indian ethnography is burdened with a formidable load of words derived from successive stages of its study. . . . This indiscriminate vocabulary gives the earnest beginner a sense of being totally out of his depth. But his eyes can drastically simplify the picture for him. They will show that there are *only three* physical types in India, not even a fourth worth speaking about. Classified by the popular and easily applied criterion of distinguishing human beings—complexion—these are the Blacks, the Browns and the Yellows. The Darks (I shall call the Blacks so) are fairly uniform, being a very deep shade of brown: the Browns on the other hand are very varied, ranging from the European blond to a dark, almost walnut brown. . . . The Darks are not Negroid but as

a rule have sharp and modelled faces, with a high though at times a rather broad nose and large, black and liquid eyes. They all have good figures, the men being muscular and wiry, the women full but not fat....

"There is fear and hatred of their Hindu rulers among the Dark aboriginals. They feel that the Hindus are going to make, and indeed have already made, deeper inroads into their territories, economy and life than was ever thought of by any set of former rulers, including the British. . . . So, after independence, may of them are claiming autonomy or at least separate provinces for themselves."

This may be dismissed as suppositious, and therefore I should like to add some objective comments. Firstly, Fr. Stephen Fuchs in his *Rebellious Prophets*, in which he describes some twenty revolts and movements among scheduled castes and tribes, such diverse peoples as the Mundas, Hos, Santhals, Chamars and Ezhavas. For example:

(a) He describes the habit of Munda rulers giving lands to Hindu officials in recompense for faithful service, copying the custom of neighbouring Hindu princes. This gradually led to Munda land becoming largely the possession of outsiders—"Many Mundas were deprived of their ancestral lands since they had no title-deeds and the Hindu revenue officers did not understand the customary Munda landed property rights. Moneylenders began their nefarious trade among the carefree and improvident tribals, and more cultivators lost their land to foreign invaders. *Diku* (foreigner) became a hated byword among the Mundas."

(b) Regarding a Santhal movement: "Still another rumour ran to the effect that people were coming to kill all foreign settlers (diku) among the Santals, especially the most hated Bengalis." This occurred, by the way, not in the Naxalbari of 1967, but around 1800! The problem has been long a-simmering.

D. N. Majumdar, in *Races and Cultures of India*, adds an interesting statement: "Tribal prestige today is in owning what they (once) had, and in restoring values they have lost. . . . On the part of Dikus (outsiders) there is a grim determination to recognise this change of attitude . . . and deep in their hearts they have realised the necessity of looking at things from the angle of incipient nationalism among the Adibasis. But prejudices die hard, and often the Dikus may be found to quarrel with the Adibasis, for not agreeing to serve them as they did before, or even to swear at the low breed and their mean demeanour, which virtually is a reaction against the new set-up in which the tribal people refuse to serve them as hewers of wood and drawers of water."

These observations describe situations closely resembling the exploitation of Red Indians and Negroes in North America and of the Bantu in South Africa. There has been economic subjugation and this subjugation runs along lines of race. The race lines are also colour lines. If we ask what countries *observably* operate system of Pale at the top, Brown in the middle and Black at the bottom, we get these answers: South Africa, Brazil, the United States, India and Ethiopia. No amount of verbal

whitewashing by any of these nations at international soirees can conceal the realities. Hence the Negro disenchantment with India when students come to study here; hence the severe racial dislocation in Guyana, Kenya and elsewhere between angry Africans and Indian colonists.

Within India we may give any name we wish to the black downtrodden substratum: Adivasis, Harijans, Neo-Buddhists, untouchables or Dasyus, whichever is currently fashionable. The name hides nothing, just as to be a "nigger" or an "Afro-American" in the States is ultimately the same thing—the social stigma of negritude. And the result in both countries in this age of rising expectations is explosive, particularly as the problems begin to be solved. India has one advantage over America. Because there is a large proportion of underprivileged black people in the country, they are better represented in Government than in the States. Jagjivan Ram is in the Cabinet, the equivalent of the as yet non-existent Negro politician on Johnson's immediate team.

Explosions in America are racial and are seen to be racial. Similar explosions in India are also racial, but the point is obscured. I would suggest that the following owe their force to "complexionism" and all that goes with it: (a) the DMK anti-Brahmin, anti-Hindi attitudes in Tamil Nad, (b) the Assam Hill tribes' uprisings, (c) the Santhal basis for the Communist insurrection in Naxalbari, (d) the Bhanjdeo atrocity among the Gonds of Bastar.

Tribal people in their own homelands have more scope for revolutionary activities than the lavatory castes of the towns. These latter are not yet vocal, tend to turn to illicit liquor for relief from meagre reality. Prohibition forces them to go in for varnishes and other lethal drinks and they sometimes die with a spectacular flourish. It may be noted that the low and outcastes provide the bulk of these tragedies and that, apart from a slight ripple of cynical interest, few in the privileged strata of society give a damn how many *Avarnas* die of varnish in Madras or "malnutrition" in Bihar.

My purpose here has not been to offer a ready-made solution to the problems of complexionism in India or anywhere else, although tentative solutions could certainly be discussed in the pages of *Opinion*. My interest at present is the elimination of the hypocrisy which insists on the removal of the speck from your neighbour's eye while you keep a seasoned plank of timber in your own. Condemning South Africa for developing a caste system—condemning Rhodesia for doing what the Indo-Aryans onle did—condemning mini-racism in the United Kingdom —these are not honest when behind the official policy of equality complexionism is still rampant in India. As Chaudhuri suggests, the upper-class Indian objection to racism in the West and South Africa may arise from his being placed with the Blacks and not with the Whites, where he considers himself to belong. That could be what is meant by "discrimination". In any case, let us admit that it exists in many other places than the over-publicised areas of Africa, Europe and America. Let it be publicised and condemned here too.

IMAGE FOR A POETRY READING

The meeting was announced
for six. No one
had arrived. I pulled
a chair by the railing
and looked
at the street outside.

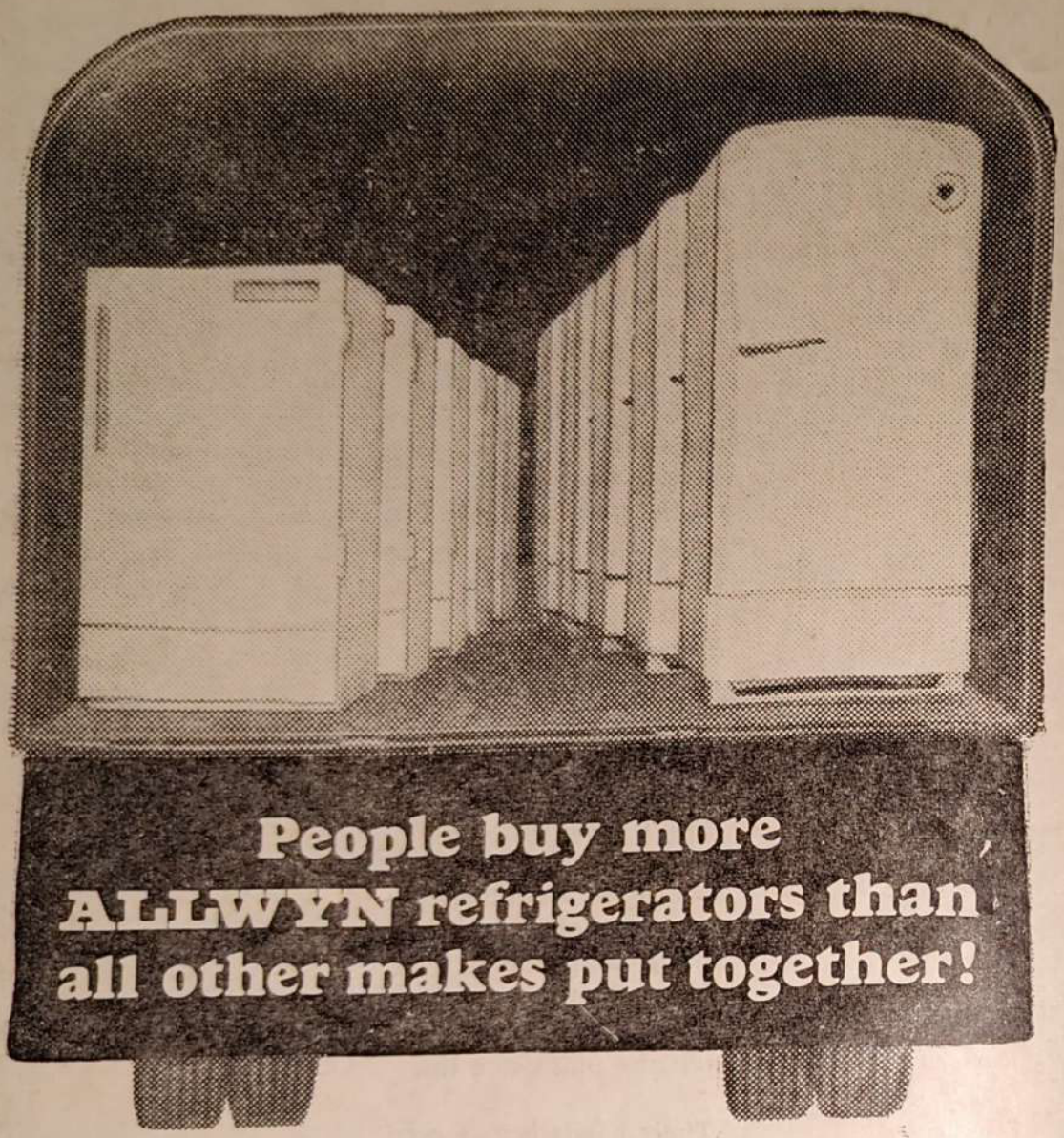
A gulmohr tree
had upset its drink
of red-and-gold
on the pavement. And
the evening
stood helplessly

a dumb waiter
street lamp in hand.
Half an hour later
the poets came.
Each one pulled out
scraps of paper

like so many grey hair
from the scalp
of his hip pocket
Oily isn't the word
for it. They hadn't
felt the pulse of a line.

Their hands hadn't read
the fever in vowels.
And the asterisks
of silence
had escaped them
altogether.

—R. Parthasarathy



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THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES BILL

T. D. WAKNIS

The Government of Maharashtra have passed in the Legislative Council a Public Libraries Bill. It will be placed before the Assembly in the November session at Nagpur and if it is approved there it will be a law. Before this happens it would be helpful to study the administrative and financial implications of the Bill.

The Government regard it expedient to establish, maintain, organise and develop public libraries and they set about doing it by establishing and maintaining a network of public libraries serving the needs of the entire state. The network will have at its head a State Central Library and four regional libraries for the four divisions of the State: Nagpur, Aurangabad, Bombay and Poona. They will be managed by the Government. At the lower levels of district and taluka towns and villages Government will ascertain if the local authority or a private society or a trust would be in a position to serve the people as a public library. If a suitable authority or society is available the Government will entrust to them the management of the local library and pay them an adequate grant. If they do not find a suitable agency they will themselves run a local library. In addition to these libraries run or sponsored by the Government for public use, Government will notify some libraries as public libraries for the purposes of this Act. Either for manning or inspecting this complex of libraries Government will bring into being a State Library Service members of which will be Government servants. Government estimate that putting into practice this plan will involve expenditure of Rs. 33.08 lakhs out of which Government stand committed already to an expenditure of Rs. 8.08 lakhs. The excess that Government will have to find will be Rs. 25 lakhs annually.

The question that rises in the minds of students of librarianship is—Is this plan likely to meet the library needs of the population ?

The Government's proposal to establish and run a State Central and four regional libraries is in consonance with universal practice. These libraries serve the State in the same way in which the National Library serves the Country. Conventionally they are financed by the revenues of the State and administered either departmentally as in the U.S.A. for the Library of Congress or by an autonomous body as in U.K. for the British Museum. They have a distinct objective. They are mostly reference libraries. They are not expected to lend books to individual readers. They will be the libraries for libraries. They will help the libraries at the district level in the search for and supply of rare books. They will house comprehensive collections of publications in the State and the region and materials throwing light on local topics places and persons.

They will have costly reference books and will be the agency for getting inaccessible materials from bigger or special libraries.

It would have been appreciated if the bill had given an indication of the scope of activities of these libraries. The Government could have also stated whether they would start from scratch or make use of existing Central and regional libraries. The Central library of the State of Maharashtra has been in existence since 1950. It is housed in the Town Hall Bombay, and is managed by the Asiatic Society of Bombay, by virtue of a trust deed made between the Government and the Asiatic Society. Similarly the regional library at Poona is housed in Vishrambag and is managed by Poona Municipal Corporation. It would definitely be economical to build round the nucleus of these existing libraries. But there may be legal difficulties for the transfer. In such circumstances not only will the annual expenditure exceed the estimate but there will be delay in implementation.

At the level of the district and other lower level libraries Government will institute libraries of their own only if they draw blank in their search for a local authority or a private society or trust who would show readiness and competence to work as public libraries. The chances are that Government will always find private bodies both willing and able to function as public libraries. These private bodies will be the existing subscription libraries which have served for years together the small number of members who have paid modest fees for their library service. Government will give them additional funds by way of annual grants, the quantum of which will probably vary directly as their own contribution and the population and inversely as their lack of development economically and educationally. In fact for the last twenty years or so this has been the pattern of organisation in Maharashtra.

In the opinion of library experts this pattern has certain inherent defects. Firstly the libraries have limits of growth set by fees which is their chief source of sustenance. Some well managed libraries maintain lists of thousands of readers waiting to be admitted as members because they do not have sufficient accommodation or number of books for them. When more than one Members' library springs up in a town, in their pride of independence they are not disposed to co-operate. As the cultural level is more or less the same everywhere the book stocks of the libraries are much of a muchness. Having once decided on the policy of giving grant to a subscription library the Government finds it logically difficult to deny grants to all libraries which satisfy minimum standards of service much in the manner in which Government gives grants to schools, which measure up to standards laid in the grant-in-aid code.

Experienced organizers of libraries however point out that schools and libraries have different objectives. In schools the teachers aim at cultivating the minds of pupils to a stage at which the pupils are adept in the art of learning by themselves. The means employed to achieve this result are a set of text books. They can be the same in all schools.

In the libraries, on the other hand, the organizers aim at stimulating and fostering the habits of self-education. The only attraction which libraries offer is that the readers are free to choose their subjects and are free to determine the time they will take to learn them. For the attainment of this object the organisers are required to house books on a wide variety of subjects. Both the matter and the manner of its presentation has to be diversified to suit the abilities and inclinations of readers. Such a book stock costs more than the text books required in schools. This is the reason why Governments have to beam their resources on one library only so that it is enabled to bring the body of citizens under its ameliorative and uplifting influence. This is the modern concept of a viable library unit. In the 1964 Libraries and Museums Act of Great Britain the county has been regarded as the unit and the parishes have been deprived of the right of running libraries. In the Maharashtra Bill there is no indication of an awareness of this concept on the part of the drafters. It was hoped that in Bombay at any rate it would be realised that it is only Dasharathi Ram who can bend the bow of Shiva and not any Rama, Shiva and Govinda.

One of the conditions of giving grants is that the receiving library will give free service to all whether they be members or not. The subscription library is thus called on to add one more class of members to its own hierarchy of patrons, life members, first, second and third class members. Constitutionally the management of a subscription library is incapable of giving the same attention and consideration to a non-payer as it has to give to its paying member in order to retain his goodwill and membership. The result is the non-paying members of the public are reduced to begging for services which they should claim as a right. Instead of becoming a centre of democratic equality the library becomes the battleground between have-lots and have-littles.

In spite of these drawbacks the pattern of organisation has been recommended in the Bill. The reason may be that the pattern is twice blessed. It blesses the Government and it blesses the subscription libraries. Government can count on the members' fees as lessening their liability for library expenditure and the subscription libraries see a prospect of growing fat at the small cost of having to submit a sheaf of returns to dispensers of largess!

To be ready to step in where no other agency is available may betoken the Government's awareness of library potential but the ingenuity of a legal provision making Government assume this responsibility is only exceeded by the ingenuity of a mahout using the elephant's trunk to pick up needles. It can be done but is wasteful of energy. Library service is a local service and Government must devolve it on local government bodies making it one of their compulsory functions.

Will not the proposal to have a State library service squander the slender library fund on jobs? If its members are to man the various libraries, that will show government's want of faith in devolution and

decentralisation, and foist on library managements servants who will not be amenable to local discipline. If they are intended to be employed as inspectors one must despair of progress. When governments have failed to take speedy action on such vital inspection reports as those of Public Accounts Committee why ask the inspectors to produce more futile papers? Inspection moreover has a corrosive effect on the mind of the inspector in that he does not have to do any creative work himself and has to allow his know-how to atrophy for lack of use.

It seems the government have erred in launching this Bill. Their definition of a Public Library is misconceived. They define it as:

(a) A library established and maintained by the State Government for the use of the public.

(b) A library recognised by the Director for the purpose of grant-in-aid from the library fund.

(c) Any other library which the State Government by notification in the official gazette declares to be a public library for the purposes of this Act.

This is at variance with the professionally accepted meaning of the term. In popular language a Public Library is described as a library of the people by the people for the people. Three features are regarded as its distinguishing marks. (a) It renders free service to all. (b) It is financed out of public funds. (c) It is operated by local self-government agencies. Any UNESCO report on Public Libraries will bear this out.

As the Bill stands therefore it is not calculated to promote either increase or improvement in library service. The three-fold increase in Government expenditure will titillate the palates of organisers of subscription libraries and enable the Government to hug to their bosom the illusion of having a library law.

"Let Death be daily before your eyes, and you will never entertain any abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything."

* * * *

"Death expecteth thee everywhere; be wise, therefore, and expect death everywhere."

* * * *

"Be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death."

VIEWS

Jag Mohan: It is not correct that artists of repute do not wish to exhibit at the Jehangir Art Gallery because of its management. Artists of repute, who are also prosperous, prefer the airconditioned Taj Art Gallery because of the additional sales-value of the venue. The prestige of the Taj Mahal Hotel, where this Gallery is situated and the comfort of the air-conditioning are considered to be two additional factors in the "art industry"! Some other artists depend on the sponsorship of the commercial Galleries like Chemould and Pundole, which are also air-conditioned. So, the Jehangir Art Gallery is patronised by the artists, who can afford to pay within the range of Rs. 20-30 per day and who can dispense with the comfort of air-conditioning. To call all the artists exhibiting at the Jehangir Art Gallery "a mass of mediocre hangers-on" is to be polemical. Artists, both established and unknown, exhibit here. All of them have as much right for "survival" in this competitive business into which art has developed now. The names of all these artists and groups can be found in the Register of the Gallery.

Contemporary Art in India has been trying to build itself through hard-selling, promotional aids, brand names, whisky parties and art critics who are biased and prejudiced. The situation is that everything goes by the painter, rather than by the painting. Art buyers have been bamboozled to such an extent that they do not buy paintings for their intrinsic worth. They buy more for the signatures on the paintings, in order to keep up with the Joneses. In this context, what the Jehangir Art Gallery and the Bombay Art Society have been doing is laudable. Recently when they co-sponsored an exhibition devoted to "Landscapes", quite a few paintings from the entries and oddly enough from the "rejected" lot too were sold. And, why should not all these artists benefit?

The Dr. Homi Bhabha Art Reference Library is the only non-lending library of art books in the city, where at any time on a working day one can get invaluable information that one wants. The bibliographies on artists, both Indian and foreign, which this Library has been building up are most useful. Priceless art books are available for consultation without pages and art reproductions missing. Should this be sacrificed for the sake of art materials for the artists? That job is being looked after by the Bombay Art Society the Artists Centre, etc. in collaboration with the Lalit Kala Akademi. The Bhulabhai Memorial Institute and other institutions too were doing this service to artists. Which is more utilitarian—art books or art materials? There can be diverse opinion. The Gallery has gone in for the Library and other institutions are looking after the art materials.

The Bombay Art Society is represented in the management of the Jehangir Art Gallery. Whether other art institutions should be also represented collectively or by rotation is a matter of doubt. In any case it will be an unwieldy way for a whole Committee to handle the bookings. An individual, who is vested with executive functions and who attends to day-to-day work is best suited to look after this.

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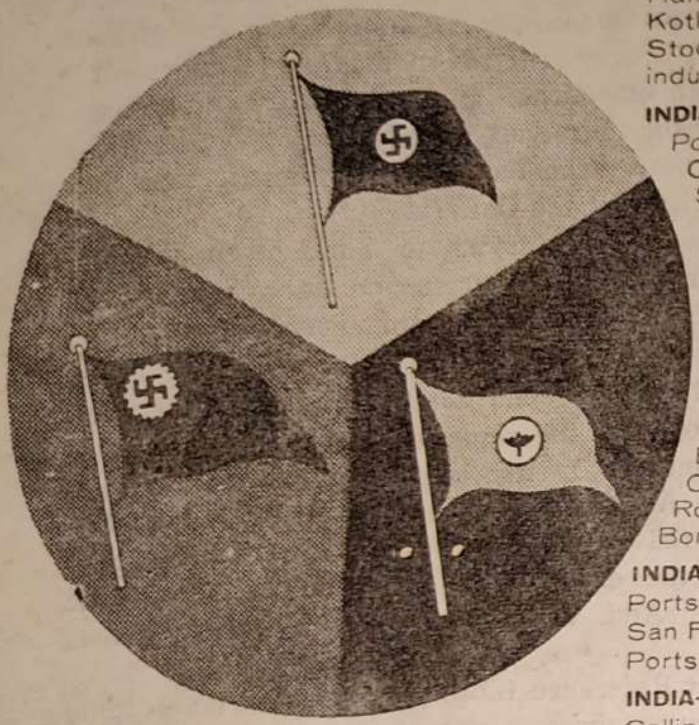

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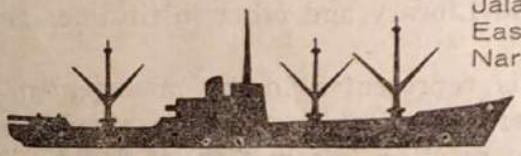

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Responding
To the rhythm
Of the lilting wind,
Its limbs swaying gracefully
And breath sibilant
Like words whispered
In moments of secrecy,
The tree, like
A strip-tease dancer
Pulls off with every puff
More and more
Of its clothing
Of pale, rustling leaves.

—O. P. Bhagat

(For the Government of India's Ministers and officials)

"Can anyone refuse assent to words of just admonition? But it is amendment that is of value. Can anyone be otherwise than pleased with advice persuasively offered? But it is the application that is of value. Mere interest without application, mere assent without amendment—what can be done with people of that type?"

* * * *

(For Vice-Chancellors and University Teachers)

(a) "He was able and fond of learning, and he was not ashamed to seek knowledge from his inferiors; that is why he has been styled Cultured."

* * * *

(b) "The scholar must not be without capacity and fortitude, for his load is heavy and the road is long. He takes virtue for his load, and is not that heavy? Only with death does his course end, and is not that long?"

OPINION

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